

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. It affects virtually every organ in the body and chronic use can lead to numerous preventable diseases, including alcoholism. According to the 1994 Monitoring the Future survey, alcohol remains the number one substance used by 8th, 10th, and 12th graders. Over 50 percent of 12th graders report drinking alcohol within the past month.

Alcohol lowers inhibitions and impairs judgement which can lead to risky behaviors, including practicing unprotected sex. This can lead to acquiring HIV/AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy. Alcohol also hinders coordination, slows reaction time, dulls senses, and blocks memory functions. The relationship between alcohol and motor vehicle crashes is widely acknowledged. In 1993, 40 percent of the 5,905 traffic fatalities of 15- to 20-year-olds were alcohol related.

Alcoholism is a disease—just like diabetes or high blood pressure. But having the disease is nothing to be ashamed of. Many teens have determined that they are alcoholics and are getting help through Alcoholics Anonymous.

Alcohol blocks the messages going to your brain and alters your perceptions and emotions, vision, hearing, and coordination.

Some people who are shy in social situations who use alcohol to loosen up, frequently end up making fools of themselves and doing things that they later regret.

Alcohol can give you bad breath and hangovers and has lots of calories.

Although it is illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to purchase, possess, and consume alcohol, many teenagers do drink. As a result, in addition to breaking the law, teens are particularly vulnerable to the various problems that alcohol can cause.

WHAT EFFECTS CAN ALCOHOL HAVE ON ME?

- * Alcohol goes directly into the bloodstream which is why it has effects on every system in the body
- ★ Heavy drinking can cause cirrhosis and cancer of the liver.
- ☺ Children in families with alcoholic members are at a higher risk for alcoholism.
- * Excessive drinking can decrease the amount of testosterone in a man's body and cause impotence.
- ❖ Alcohol abuse can lead to both homicides and suicides.
- ✧ Drinking can cause serious injuries and death—over 38% of drownings are alcohol-related.
- † Long-term effects of heavy alcohol use include loss of appetite, vitamin deficiencies, stomach ailments, sexual impotence, liver damage, heart and central nervous system damage, and memory loss.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE A DRINKING PROBLEM?

Chances are if you're even asking the question, you have a drinking problem. But here are some other factors:

- ★ inability to control your drinking—it seems that regardless of what you decide beforehand, you frequently wind up drinking too much
- * using alcohol to escape your problems
- ✈ changing from your usual reserved character into the "life of the party"
- ✂ a change in personality—does drinking turn you from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde?
- 🍷 a high tolerance level—you can drink just about everybody under the table
- * blackouts—sometimes you don't remember what happened when you were drinking
- ☐ problems at work or in school as a result of drinking
- ✱ concern shown by your family and friends about your drinking

If you have a drinking problem, or if you suspect you have one, there are many others out there like you, and there is help available. Talk to a school counselor, a friend, or a parent, and check the back of this pamphlet for some valuable resource information.